

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A distractor comprising:  
first and second handles;  
first and second jaws respectively associated with said first and second handles;  
a first set of blades extending from said first jaw; said first set of blades comprising at least a first blade and a second blade, said first and second blades being separated by a dimension sufficient to permit insertion of an implant therebetween;  
a second set of blades extending from said second jaw; said second set of blades comprising at least a first blade and a second blade, said first and second blades being separated by a dimension sufficient to permit insertion of the implant therebetween; and  
a distractor mechanism coupled between said handles and said jaws such that movement of said handles actuates said distractor mechanism to move said jaws apart,  
wherein said first and second sets of blades ~~each comprise at least first and second blades spaced apart to~~ contact anatomical elements to be distracted and permit insertion of the an implant between said ~~first and second set of blades~~ and said anatomical elements.
2. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the distractor mechanism includes an open position in which said first set of blades is spaced relative to said second set of blades, and a closed position in which at least a portion of said first set of blades contacts at least a portion of said second set of blades; and  
the first set of blades includes at least a portion that is spaced from at least a portion of the second set of blades when the distractor is in the closed position to permit placement of an implant therebetween for insertion between said anatomical elements.
3. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the distractor mechanism includes an open position in which said first set of blades is spaced relative to said second set of blades, and a closed position in which at least a portion of said first set of blades contacts at least a portion of said second set of blades; and  
the first jaw includes at least a portion that is spaced relative to at least a portion of the second jaw when the distractor is in the closed position to permit the placement of an implant prior to insertion between the first and second set of blades.

4. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first set of blades lie in the same plane and the second set of blades lie in the same plane; and the at least first and second blades of each set are laterally spaced relative to one another.

5. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first set of blades has an insertion length and the second set of blades has an insertion length, and the insertion length of the first set of blades is different from the insertion length of the second set of blades.

6. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second set of blades are integrally attached to their respective first and second jaws.

7. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein at least one of the first and second sets of blades is removably attached to its respective first and second jaws.

8. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the distractor mechanism further comprises:

a pair of first and second proximal lever arms each having proximal and distal ends; and

a pair of first and second distal lever arms each having proximal and distal ends,

wherein:

said first handle is located at said proximal end of said first proximal lever arm;

said second handle is located at said proximal end of said second proximal lever arm;

said first jaw is located at said distal end of said first distal lever arm;

said second jaw is located at said distal end of said second distal lever arm;

one of said pair of proximal lever arms and said pair of distal lever arms is crosswise pivotally coupled; and

the other of said pair of proximal lever arms and said pair of distal lever arms is laterally pivotally coupled.

9. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaws each include a mating fixture and the first and second set of blades each include a mating portion, wherein each mating portion is shaped for removable association with each mating fixture.

10. (Original) The distractor of claim 9, wherein each mating portion is a post and each mating fixture is a socket.

11. (Original) The distractor of claim 9, wherein each mating portion is a socket and each mating portion is a post.

12. (Original) The distractor of claim 9, wherein the mating fixture is positioned on an upper surface of the first and second jaws and at least a portion of the first and second blades extends substantially perpendicular to the upper surface of the first and second jaws.

13. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaws are removably associated with the first and second handles.

14. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second set of blades are removably associated with the first and second jaws.

15. (Original) The distractor of claim 9, further comprising a locking mechanism for locking the position of the mating portion relative to the mating fixture.

16. (Original) The distractor of claim 15, wherein the locking mechanism includes a ball portion.

17. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the first set of blades extends at a first angle relative to the first jaw and at least a portion of the second set of blades extends at a second angle relative to the second jaw.

18. (Original) The distractor of claim 17, wherein the first angle is substantially the same as the second angle.

19. (Original) The distractor of claim 17, wherein the first and second angles range from about 20° to 30° relative to a longitudinal axis of the distractor mechanism.

20. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second set of blades include at least one curved portion.

21. (Original) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaws include at least one curved portion.

22. (Original) A method of distracting adjacent vertebrae comprising the steps of:  
providing a distractor comprising first and second handles, first and second jaws respectively coupled to said first and second handles, a first set of spaced apart blades extending from said first jaw, a second set of spaced apart blades extending from said second jaw, and a distractor mechanism coupled between said handles and said jaws;

positioning said first set of spaced apart blades against spaced apart ends of a first vertebral endplate;

positioning said second set of spaced apart blades against spaced apart ends of a second vertebral endplate adjacent and facing said first vertebral endplate;

actuating said distractor mechanism to distract said first and second vertebral endplates; and

inserting an implant between said first and second sets of blades and said first and second vertebral endplates.

23. (Previously Added) A distractor comprising:

first and second handles;

first and second jaws respectively associated with said first and second handles;

a first set of blades extending from said first jaw, a second set of blades extending from said second jaw, said first and second sets of blades each comprise at least first and second blades spaced apart to contact anatomical elements to be distracted and permit insertion of an implant between said anatomical elements; and

a distractor mechanism coupled between said handles and said jaws such that movement of said handles actuates said distractor mechanism to move said jaws,

wherein the distractor mechanism further comprises:

a pair of first and second proximal lever arms each having proximal and distal ends; and

a pair of first and second distal lever arms each having proximal and distal ends,

wherein:

said first handle is located at said proximal end of said first proximal lever arm;

said second handle is located at said proximal end of said second proximal lever arm;

said first jaw is located at said distal end of said first distal lever arm;

said second jaw is located at said distal end of said second distal lever arm;

one of said pair of proximal lever arms and said pair of distal lever arms is crosswise pivotally coupled; and

the other of said pair of proximal lever arms and said pair of distal lever arms is laterally pivotally coupled.

24. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 23, wherein the distractor mechanism includes an open position in which said first set of blades is spaced relative to said second set of blades, and a closed position in which at least a portion of said first set of blades contacts at least a portion of said second set of blades; and

the first set of blades includes at least a portion that is spaced from at least a portion of the second set of blades when the distractor is in the closed position to permit placement of an implant therebetween for insertion between said anatomical elements.

25. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 23, wherein the distractor mechanism includes an open position in which said first set of blades is spaced relative to said second set of blades, and a closed position in which at least a portion of said first set of blades contacts at least a portion of said second set of blades; and

the first jaw includes at least a portion that is spaced relative to at least a portion of the second jaw when the distractor is in the closed position to permit the placement of an implant prior to insertion between the first and second set of blades.

26. (Currently Amended) A distractor comprising:  
a proximal end having first and second handles located in a first plane;  
a distal end having first and second jaws respectively associated with said first and second handles, said first and second jaws located in a second plane different from the first;

a first set of blades extending from said first jaw, a second set of blades extending from said second jaw, said first and second sets of blades each comprise at least first and second blades spaced apart to contact anatomical elements to be distracted and permit insertion of an implant between said first and second set of blades and said anatomical elements; and

a distractor mechanism coupled between said handles and said jaws such that movement of said handles actuates said distractor mechanism to move said jaws apart, wherein the first plane is angled angle with respect to the second plane so as to permit visualization of the blades from the proximal end.

27. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 26, wherein at least one of the first and second sets of blades is removably attached to its respective first and second jaws.

28. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 26, wherein the first and second jaws are removably associated with the first and second handles.

29. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 26, wherein the first and second set of blades are removably associated with the first and second jaws.

30. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 26, wherein the first plane and the second plane form an angle therebetween ranging from about 5° to about 30°.

31. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 30, wherein the angle ranges from about 5° to about 20°.

32. (Previously Added) The distractor of claim 30, wherein the angle is substantially 15°.

33. (New) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the dimension separating the first set of blades is substantially identical to the dimension separating the second set of blades.

34. (New) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the implant does not engage the first and second set of blades when the implant is inserted between said anatomical elements.

35. (New) The distractor of claim 1, wherein the implant does not contact the first and second set of blades when the implant is inserted between said anatomical elements.